

## UNcomfortable

BY KEN HORN



A revival is not just a time of spiritual enthusiasm. Revivals bring results. Revivals are stamped as genuine when people are saved in large numbers and when many lives are transformed. This includes Christians who serve God with a new fervor. Healings and deliverances often accompany a move of God.

But there are usually outward effects that raise questions, causing some to wonder, *Is this of God?*

Consider the following common characteristics found in many historic revivals:

#### Surprising and unusual leadership

Jonathan Edwards, a shy, bookish, nearsighted preacher who read his sermons word for word from a prepared manuscript, was God's key pastor in the First Great Awakening (c. 1734-58). The evangelist was George Whitefield, an outgoing member of John Wesley's Holy Club, who preached extemporaneously and loudly enough to be heard by as many as 30,000 people. These two men could not have had more different public personas.

Edwards recorded the events of the Great Awakening in his writ-

ings. This reserved New England preacher from Puritan stock became the fulcrum for defense of the occurrences in the First Great Awakening. Though he was uncomfortable with emotionalism, he defended God's right to work in such a way. He could not deny the fruit.

#### Spiritual creativity

Times of revival are led by individuals who are not bound by tradition or afraid of criticism. Charles G. Finney, "the father of revivalism," blazed a trail for D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham and other soul winners when he was the first to use cer-

tain "new measures" that were soundly criticized by many clergy. What were his new measures? Calling for an immediate decision for Christ; the "anxious bench," forerunner of the church altar; informality in speaking and prayer; allowing women to pray in public; adding new converts quickly to church membership; and open-ended meetings that continued as long as God was pleased to move.

But innovation is never a goal in itself. God's anointing can rest upon traditional methods as well.

#### Straight preaching

Preaching on sin, holiness and

repentance dominates revival preaching. It was said of John Wesley's "plain and fearless preaching" that "the power of God came with His Word."

#### Pilgrimage

Though it is not necessary to travel to a revival for a special touch from God, this has occurred in historical outpourings ... frequently with a resulting spread of the spiritual fire. Camp meetings in the 1800s drew people from all over the frontier, with many traveling farther than they ever had in their lives.

People came to Azusa Street

from all over the world. One was William H. Durham, who was mightily touched by God when William J. Seymour prayed for him. When Durham returned to his mission in Chicago, a move of God began and pastors who couldn't reach Los Angeles began attending there. Among those filled with the Holy Spirit were A.H. Argue, who became a leader in the Pentecostal movement in Canada, and E.N. Bell of Fort Worth, Texas, the first chairman of the Assemblies of God.

In 1905 T.B. Barratt came from Norway and received the Holy Spirit in a Pentecostal mission

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THE SECOND IN A SERIES ON REVIVAL  
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in New York City. When he returned, his own mission became Philadelphia Church, the largest non-Lutheran Church in Norway.

A Swedish Baptist pastor, Lewi Pethrus, came to Barratt's church, received the Baptism and returned to Sweden, where the move of God followed. From Sweden, it went to South America, a stronghold of revival to this day.

**Making room for unbelievers**

In the Second Great Awakening, Jacob Knapp's meetings were so well attended and there were so many people saved that often many Christians stayed home so there would be room for unbelievers. They used the time for home prayer meetings. This phenomenon has frequently been repeated.

**Enthusiastic worship**

Howell Harris, the Welsh preacher converted in 1735, found his services often accompanied by "scenes of wild enthusiasm."

At Cane Ridge, Ky., flashpoint of the western portion of the Second Great Awakening, it was said the sound of thousands shouting together could be heard for miles.

The high energy of repeated praise choruses even has precedent. At Azusa Street it was "The Comforter Has Come" that was repeated over and over.

**Tongues**

There were no Pentecostal denominations (by practice) when the Spirit was poured out near the turn of the 20th century. It was the Holiness denominations that first experienced tongues. Even before the Assemblies of God was formed in 1914, 100 people had spoken in tongues at a Christian and Mis-

sionary Alliance camp meeting in Nyack, N.Y. The charismatic movement of the 1970s saw this occur in mainline churches of every stripe.

**Crying out**

During Edwards' sermons, there were often "cryings out in the meeting house." He understood this to be the result of conviction that brought souls to Christ.

David Brainerd was the catalyst for revival among Native Americans in 1745-46. Often in his diary he mentioned the cries and tears of Indian hearers as indications of conviction and considered it a sign of "less affection" for the things of God when these were not present.

**Other responses**

High emotions, falling, crying out, tears, even shaking, all occurred in revivals before a modern Pentecostal ever appeared. People who "fell under the power of God" included Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans and others. In the early days of the Salvation Army (mid-1800s), in the meetings of General William Booth, "persons were frequently stricken down ... overwhelmed with a sense of the presence and power of God."<sup>1</sup>

**Criticism from within the church**

Charles Chauncey was revival's chief critic in Edwards' day. In the face of transformed multitudes, he championed the cause of dignified religious exercises. Forms were more important than souls.

Finney, Wesley, Moody and Sunday were all criticized by churchmen. It is a sad but consistent pattern that professing Chris-

tians resistant to revival are often the loudest voices against it.

In 1910, William F.P. Burton attended a meeting at which he first witnessed speaking in other tongues; although he was convinced it was from God, he was disturbed by people "falling to the ground, laughing, groaning, trembling, and seeing visions."

An older saint gave him advice that resonates today: "We don't encourage such manifestations, but we are not at all surprised when they do occasionally occur. We have learned the lesson which Michal learned so dearly, that it does not do to belittle those who are carried away with the joy of the Lord." (See 2 Samuel 6:16-23.)<sup>2</sup>

(This in no way absolves believers from the necessary task of using godly discernment. There certainly have been counterfeits and excesses that needed to be addressed.)

The sounds of sinners repenting or even Christians rejoicing may stir some slumbering saints from their comfort zones. That's a good thing. The alternative is lifeless religion.

Revival is always uncomfortable, and it always includes challenges. It is never without its problems. But it's better than the alternative — far better to have imperfect revival than perfect apathy. **tpe**

<sup>1</sup> James Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (Warner Press, 1911), p. 257.


<sup>2</sup> Colin C. Whittaker, *Seven Pentecostal Pioneers* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1983), p.156.

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